

Tordoff, Jeff

Sept 1965

Southern Is. Cruise #9

Jeff Tordoff

Southern Island Cruise #9
1965

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At-sea

7 September

Departed Honolulu at 1000 hours,
began SW course. Life bird: Sooty
Shearwater.

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8 September

Spent packing, reading, standing  
watch. A few Sooty Shearwaters seen.  
Cook's Petrels now being logged  
as Black-Winged Petrels for some  
reason.

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9 September

Spent reading, Standing watch. Saw
interesting bird in flock of Wedgetails,
dark above, light below, slightly
smaller than a Wedgetail. It
looked like a large Sooty Tern
sitting on the water with a
longish tail and wing
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10 September

Arrived Johnston Atoll at  
approx. 0800 hours to take on fuel  
and fix oil leak. Temporary passes  
issued for shore leave from 0830

## At-sea

until 1300 hours. Walked all around island looking at buildings, Tropicbird nests, and people. Island is almost barren of plants. Fairly good recreation facilities provided, all military personnel stay one year - No dependents allowed. Went to PX, prices good on some things, high on others. Many landing craft in use around island. Departed Johnston about 1430, into rougher seas immediately. I'm pretty sure I'm to be put on Baker with Paul Woodward for six days.

11 September

A Juan Fernandez Petrel and a white-necked Petrel collected today. I put up the Juan Fernandez. The White-Neck looked very similar to the JFP on the ventral dorsal side but had a little more white on the back of the neck. The JFP had very little black on the underwing while the WNP had a distinct black border on the leading and

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At-sea

trailing edges. A *Pterodroma hypoleuca* was seen which was light on the head and back like *P.h. nigripennis*, but had underwing pattern exactly like that of *P.h. hypoleuca*.



I stood night watch from 1800 to 2200 hours. No birds observed after dark. Venus very bright in W SW sky. Water appears cloudy in ship's lights at night, possibly from plankton. Food is miserable, bread is mouldy already, main dishes are awful.

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12 September

Another Juan Fernandez Petrel collected today. I put up an immature Sooty Tern with an unusually large ovary, 11x4 mm. It had been eating squid and fish of some sort. A Blue-faced Booby shot today had part of a fish in it which looked like a young mahimahi (dolphin.)

## At-Sea

13 September

We must be in the doldrums as the sea was extremely smooth except for ripples and the ever-present swell. Toward evening the ripples died away and the surface was glassy. ~~the sea has been~~

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~~the sea has been~~ and some "water striders" that look very much like those that occur on fresh water except that they are white above instead of dark. Many <sup>soft</sup> fish were jumping after flying fish, they looked like tuna, probably around 10-15 pounds.

At sunset we saw about thirty small whales rolling and jumping.

Someone said they were "pilot" whales. I put up an immature Sooty Tern and the first Sooty Shearwater ever seen collected. The Shearwater had  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of fat all around the body and pieces up to an inch thick inside the body cavity. While Bayle Husted and one of the sailors were chasing

## At-Sea

shearwaters in the small boat, we saw a glass ball floating with a common Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) sitting on it. We approached at half speed but it flew before we could shoot it. Paul Woodward picked up the ball and also a five inch trigger fish of some sort. It was brown with white spots and its gills and operculum were covered by skin with only a small "exhaust slit" at the rear. It had rough, sand-paper like skin. I shot at a wandering Tattler and hit it but it flew off.

14 September

Overcast all day and intermittently rainy. Dark shearwaters coming by in large numbers 1000-2000 per hour. Three collected which look like the Booty from yesterday but are smaller and have darker underwings. They might be Blunder-Bills, everyone has a different opinion. Several

## At-Sea - Howland

*Pterodroma leucoptera* have come by today, as well as two Long-Tailed Jaegers. I saw none of them, naturally. I put up a Juan Fernandez Petrel (*Pterodroma ultima ultima*) which had very little fat on it. Seas not smooth like yesterday.

15 September

Many dark shearwaters coming by again today. Arrived at Howland at about  $\frac{2245}{2245}$  but didn't land until about 0200. Saw two cats. Some sort of disease is killing the Frigatbirds. They all seem emaciated. Helped Cameron Kepler collect Berlese samples and then went out with Fleet, Harrington, and Amerman to take blood samples. Got about 19 Blue-Footed Boobies, one Brown Booby, and one lesser Frigate (*Fregata ariel*). Noticed while taking nest samples that Red-Footed Booby nests are full of dermestids and skinks. Caught a little brown gecko of some sort on a cardboard box. On

## Howland - Baker

the way into the island, many porpoise were swimming with the ship. The noise of the blow-holes and the high-pitched squeaking were easily heard. As they swim the porpoise disturb some sort of bio-luminescent organism which glows.

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16 September

Came off Howland at 0630, got equipment for Baker ready, and slept until 1130. Landed on Baker at 1230 approx. and set up camp. Paul Woodward and I walked around the island and saw very few birds. I saw one Blue-faced Booby nest with a chick, some Ruddy Turnstones, Wandering Tattlers, Golden Plovers, and Bristle-Tailed Gull. Many Hermit crabs and skinks running about. Pulled two Hermit crabs out of their shells, one male and one female. The female had clusters of blackish eggs hidden in the shell or

## Baker

the soft part of her body. Some Black-Tipped sharks were in shallow water on the south side of the island.

17 September

I took the shorebird count this morning, saw seven Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanum*), thirteen Bristle-Thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*), eighteen Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) and one hundred seventy-four Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). Saw two gray moray eels about three feet long. There are fish in every pool along the shore. Most of them are dark with vertical stripes. Crabs seen everywhere. Saw one Blue-Footed Booby nest with two eggs and found a Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*) on the beach unable to fly. I took him back to camp and skinned him out,

bill black, iris dk. brown, gape grayish purple,  
feet & tarsi grayish purple, 130 grms., not fat, very  
thin, ♂ left testis 4x3 mm, right testis 3x2 mm

stomach empty, Pacific Ocean, Baker Island

17 September 1965

At 1700 I sat on the lighthouse to

## Baker

make the periodic check on island activity. The results between 1700 and 1730 are as follows

8 Blue-Faced Boobies in club on SE side of island.

1 Hawaiian Noddy (*Anous minutus*) on lighthouse

several whales off SW shore

15-20 large tuna jumping off north shore

3 Hawaiian Noddy, 1 common Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) on north beach, also 1 wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanum*)

$25 \pm 2$  Frigate sp. circling high off SE side, another  $20 \pm 2$  Frigates and  $15 \pm 3$  Booby sp. feeding below them

3 Blue-Faced Booby flying into island from north

I caught and pickled a number of skins and then went

## Baker

fishing in front of the camp. I lost the first plug to a small shark, made a wire leader for a spoon, caught 3 skipjack, and lost the rig to a 3-4 pound sea bass out of stupidity. Paul Woodward and I went out after dark and got 10 Blue-faced Booby returns, banded 2 Hawaiian Noddies, 3 common Noddies, and 2 Ruddy Turnstones. I set out 25 mouse traps but the Hermit crabs will beat any mice to them.

18 September

At about 0030 this morning I went up to the lighthouse and caught a jar full of little brown geckos. The Hermit crabs have just about finished the three skipjack which weighed about  $\frac{3}{4}$  # apiece. We were awakened about 0300 by voices outside the tent, which turned out to be Mr. Ashton, Gayle Husted, and a sailor from the Shearwater. They had stopped by

## Baker

to repair our radio. I went out to the ship and brought in my shark hooks, 2 bags of ice, and a headlamp. We got back to bed at 0330 and got up at 0930. I went to try and get returns from 2 Blue Faced Boobies but couldn't catch them. Caught six skipjacks, one of which weighed over a pound. Tried to use shark line in surf by camp but wouldn't work. Made island check at 1150. Results are as follows:

1150 to 1200

1 Blue-faced Booby <sup>low</sup> ~~off~~ over water off west shore

6 Hawaiian Noddies, 1 Common Noddy sitting on NW shore

1 Blue-faced Booby on water off near shore

7 Frigate sp. circling off south shore

Lost a spinner to a fish that weighed approx. 5 pounds. We slept

Baker

from 1300 until 1530, ~~when~~ I went to take some pictures from the lighthouse. Had a light shower from 1645 until about 1655. At 1730 I walked across to the lagoon to see if I could find out what time the noddies came in but they didn't show up. I saw a flock of eleven Brown Boobies (*Sula leucogaster*) and one lone individual while sitting by the lagoon & collected two Sharp-Tailed Sandpipers (*Erolia acuminata*) which I put up when I got back to camp. Paul and I were out after dark and banded a Bristle-Tufted Curlew some Noddies, and some Boobies. Walked along the shore and looked in tide pools at thousands of fish and crabs. Tossed a two foot Moray eel up on the bank with the net and in the ensuing battle he grabbed me by the ankle and tore a large hole in my sock. I finally subdued him by standing on his neck and cut off his head to

Baker  
save for the skull.

Data for Sharp-Tailed Sandpipers:

Cat. #80 - *Erolia acuminata* - Baker Id., Pacific Ocean  
18 Sept. 1965, bill orange (proximal  $\frac{1}{2}$ ) and gray  
(distal  $\frac{1}{2}$ ), iris dk. brown, gape whitish  
purple, feet & tarsi yellow  
♀, left testis  $2.5 \times 1$  mm, rt. testis  $2 \times 1$  mm  
56 grams, moderate fat

Cat. #81 - *Erolia acuminata* - Baker Island, Pac. Ocean  
18 Sept. 1965, bill orange (~~distal~~ proximal  $\frac{1}{2}$ ) and gray  
(distal  $\frac{1}{2}$ ), iris dk. brown, gape whitish  
purple, feet & tarsi yellow  
♀, ovary  $5 \times 4$  mm, no ova measurable  
40 grams, light fat

19 September

Got up at 0430, went over to lagoon to try and shoot red painted Ruddy Turnstone from Aleutians but didn't see it. Shot another Sharp-Tailed Sandpiper but was unable to use it as most of the head was blown away. Lost my sunglasses on the way back.

Baker - At 8:00  
watched some large squalls go by to  
the west. Dark shearwaters were  
streaming by between the rain and  
the island. Went out and got two  
berlese samples from Blue-faced  
Booby nests, the only two nests  
on the island. While looking  
at the shearwaters saw a 20+ foot  
long Killer whale just offshore.  
They don't usually come in that  
close, I think. Rained very hard  
from ~~0830~~<sup>2030</sup> until 9:2130. At 2:230  
I collected four soil samples. Radio  
check at 2:400. This is the last night  
on Baker.

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20 September

Came off Baker at 0630, getting  
out was a bit rough. Got gear  
for McKean ready and put  
up a sandpiper and made  
a skeleton of a Blue-faced Booby.

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21 September

Had our "shell-back" initiation  
this morning. We had to kiss the  
queen's (Paul Woodward) toe, eat some sort

of sticky goop, and bios the "royal belly" Oliver ~~#~~ Kalaau's stomach, plastered with more of the same junk). Arrived at McKean at 1000. I caught a fine foot shark from the S. shearwater

McKean

Sooty Tern colony very small, hard to work due to thick vegetation. Many species nesting on the island but none in numbers great enough to warrant an all-out banding effort. Many Lesser Frigate bands were recovered during the nest count. I banded Blue-Gray Noddies one night and took blood the next, during the day I banded Tropicbirds and collected (1 RTTB, 1 BFB, 1 Red-rumped Turnstone, 1 Turnstone sans red rump)



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16-

Hull

2 Large ~~colonies~~<sup>colonies</sup> of boobies in  
last stages of breeding cycle. Banded  
5 nights. Nest count revealed